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While researchers and the popular press have been interested in understanding the blogs and blogging behaviors of the civilian public, curiously scant empirical studies of military blogs ("milblogs") and milbloggers exist. Using a "uses and gratifications" approach, common in communication and media studies, this paper reports on a qualitative analysis of milblog content and milbloggers' motivations for blogging their experiences while deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. The study used a convenience sample of 12 publicly available milblogs, comprising 138 posts during Summer 2009. Analysis has been conducted through content analysis and iterative pattern coding. The majority of milblog content focused on loved ones at home and local translators. Blogging gratifications fell into six main categories. Research goals included filling a gap in the blogging literature, providing a descriptive benchmark of milblogs at a particular point in history, expanding the uses and gratifications framework, and exploring self-presentation amongst milbloggers.

#### Headings:

Soldiers -- United States -- Blogs.

Blogs -- Social aspects.

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GOING DEEPER INTO THE BLOGS OF WAR:  
A STUDY OF MILITARY BLOG CONTENT AND GRATIFICATIONS

by  
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## **Introduction**

On Tuesday evening, August 31, 2010, President Barack Obama declared an end to the seven-year American combat mission in Iraq (The White House, 2010). In his prime-time address from the Oval Office, President Obama also reiterated his goal of ending the war operations in Afghanistan, which began weeks after Al Qaeda's attacks on September 11th over nine years ago at the time of this writing. Although Obama announced, "Operation Iraqi Freedom is over," about 49,700 troops will remain in Iraq through Summer 2011 (Cooper & Stolberg, 2010). Despite this publicized milestone, the Global War on Terror continues, and the U.S. military, civilian contractors, media, and citizens at home know that it is likely to linger for a long while yet.

As in past wars, military personnel and their loved ones at home face uncertain futures, complex feelings, and difficult geographic distances. Unlike in past wars, information and communication now can be fast, inexpensive, and, sometimes, immediately public. Email and satellite phones have helped bridge communication gaps, but blogs—small, online web pages comprising a series of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order and usually containing content focused on a theme or personal experience (Blood, 2002)—offer greater narrative potential, are faster and more reliable than traditional postal services, may be less presumptuous than mass emails, may be easier than keeping a diary (for people more accustomed to typing than writing), and provide flexibility in format (text and images can be uploaded together and coding is usually handled by blog template providers). The mainstream blogosphere, meaning the

online world made up of blogs and their interconnected hyperlinks, grew up concurrently with the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars; blogs now pervade the information landscape. A broad set of blogs known as “warblogs” have been created and maintained by people who focus their blog posts on the Iraq War; warbloggers include military personnel stationed in Iraq (or Afghanistan), veterans, Iraqi citizens, journalists, students, activists, and media celebrities. Blogging about the wars made headlines in mainstream popular media starting in 2002-2003 (e.g., Kornblum, 2003; Perrone, 2003; Walker, 2003). The type of warblog created and maintained specifically by U.S. military men and women is now commonly called a “milblog.” This study’s goals are to explore the topic of milblogs—the blogs of currently or recently deployed U.S. military personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan, including Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force—by examining the content of milblogs and by attempting to identify what motivates soldier bloggers to engage in blogging activities.

Despite all the scholarly research and popular reports about blogs and bloggers in the civilian public as well as news coverage of military blogging activities, there is curiously scant published empirical research on milblogs and milbloggers. As the wars continue and the information and communication landscape transforms—and as policy changes within the military likely follow—descriptive explorations of milblogs will be essential to the understanding of the full extent of today’s information environment as well as to the understanding of soldiers’ war experiences. This study seeks not only to reveal and illuminate the topic of milblogging, and thereby fill a gap in the civilian-blog-centric scholarly literature, but also to provide a descriptive benchmark of milblogs at

their present stage, which can serve as a historical point of comparison with the inevitable future evolution of the phenomenon.

Using the communications framework of “uses and gratifications”—an approach typically used to reveal motivations for media use—as well as the concept of self-presentation to explore milblogs, this study is guided by two research questions:

**RQ1: What is the focus of the content in milblogs?**

**RQ2: What gratifications do milbloggers appear to be receiving through their blogging activities?**

These related questions ask what milblogs are about and why do milbloggers blog. By focusing on the answers to these questions, this study intends to shed light on milblogs. The following research paper comprises a review of the relevant literature, a background on relevant content analysis methods, a description of methods used, study results, a discussion section, appendices and a reference list.

The literature review explains and explores the uses and gratifications approach to understanding online communications media, the concept of self-presentation and why it is pertinent to blog research and media content analysis methods, and how a study of milblogging fills an existing gap in the scholarly literature. It concludes with an acknowledgement of the potential problems in blog research.

Qualitative content analysis and iterative pattern coding are the methods selected to collect, study, and analyze the data in this study. The methods section of this proposal includes a brief description of these methods, an explanation of why particular methods were selected, and a step-by-step description of the methods used. The notion of

“trustworthiness” with regard to qualitative research methods is discussed, as well as the advantages and challenges of the methods for this particular study.

The method section is followed by the study’s results, a discussion of these results, and ideas for further study. Finally, appendices and a detailed reference list conclude the paper. The appendices include a summarized list of the blogging gratifications found in previous research studies and codebooks for milblog content and gratifications coding.



## **Review of the Literature**

### **Uses and Gratifications**

Exploring blogs is not a new subject for research in the fields of communications, journalism, and information science. Furthermore, the uses and gratifications (U&G) approach has been applied to the study of Internet use since the mid-1990s. The U&G framework was born out of a social-psychological communications perspective exploring media effects and examines, chiefly, how people interact with and use media (Blumler & Katz, 1974). U&G focuses on motives for media use, factors that influence motives (antecedents), and the outcomes from media-related behavior; the framework is used to address the needs a particular mass medium fulfills for its users (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Chung & Kim, 2008; Papacharissi, 2002b). The essential elements of this approach state that

- people are active selectors of media
- media use is goal-directed
- media compete as functional alternatives for need satisfaction
- people are relatively self-aware of their interests and motives, and
- researchers must suspend value judgments about the cultural significance of various media (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974, pp. 21-22).

U&G asserts that individuals engage in media behaviors based on psycho-social needs (motivations) and that those media behaviors satisfy those needs (gratifications);

using this approach has facilitated research on what motivates individuals to seek out a particular communication medium (e.g., newspapers, radio, or television). This approach has been particularly helpful in exploring and analyzing new communication media as they develop. Despite criticisms of the U&G approach, the emergence and success of the Internet has rekindled a serious and significant interest in the perspective as new online technologies present audiences with more media choices and more ways to become active users (Ruggiero, 2000). Additionally, the unique attributes of the Internet not associated with traditional mass communication—notably: interactivity, demassification, and asynchronicity—have piqued researchers’ interest in using U&G to explore why people choose online forms of mediated communication and what gratifications they receive from it (Ruggiero, 2000).

While academic studies have used U&G to delve into the motivations and gratifications of using the Internet as a whole as well as using its web components, including email, chat rooms, bulletin boards, interest-specific websites, personal webpages, and social-networking sites like MySpace and Facebook (Charney & Greenberg, 2002; Dominick, 1999; Kaye, 2005; Kaye & Johnson, 2002; Lee, Im, & Taylor, 2008; Papacharissi, 2002a, 2002b; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008), of particular interest to this study is the exploration of blogs and the gratifications bloggers receive from creating blogs. For further information regarding U&G typologies in computer-mediated communication (CMC), see Li (2005), Table 1.1: Selected New Media Uses and Gratifications Typologies (1995-2005).

Historically, the U&G perspective was used to look at how individuals differ in their *consumption* of media as opposed to their *production* of media. This more

traditional approach can still be found in the study of blogs, as U&G has been helpful in explaining why blog *readers* might turn to certain blogs and not others, or why they might choose to get their news or information from blogs instead of from mainstream sources (e.g., Chung & Kim, 2008; Kaye, 2005; Wall, 2005). U&G and the study of blog-reading behaviors have become so closely linked that in her recent paper analyzing blog use motivations, Kaye (2010) attempted to develop a new U&G measurement scale specifically for blogs instead of relying on preexisting items designed for older communications technologies and adapting them to blogs.

It has been argued that blogs are different from other online venues because they provide the reader with a range of levels of activity and engagement, usually utilize user-friendly software, and, as mentioned earlier, blogs themselves differ in terms of type (Herring et al., 2005; Kaye, 2005; Kaye, 2010; Papacharissi, 2007). Although Kaye's descriptive analysis and resulting nine motivational factors readily suggest the applicability of the U&G approach to the study of blogs and elucidate possible gratifications sought and received within the blogosphere, because it focuses on the blog *readers* (audience) and not the blog *creators* (bloggers), her study has only limited implications for the present study.

Despite some focus on the consumers of Internet information, extending the U&G approach into the 21st century has meant exploring media audiences as *producers* as well as consumers of content. In examining the motivations of individuals creating personal homepages, Papacharissi (2002b) empirically identified six interpretable factors for hosting a webpage, including passing time, entertainment, information, self-expression, communication with friends and family, and professional advancement. In-depth

interviews with a small sample of bloggers led Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, and Schwartz (2004) to five major motives for blogging: documenting one's life; offering commentary and opinions; expressing emotions; "thinking through writing"; and connecting with others online.

Chung and Kim (2008) focused on the gratifications of cancer patients who read and write blogs and found that prevention and care, problem-solving, emotion management, and information sharing were the four areas of gratifications received from their blogging activities.

Using U&G as a framework and similar motivation categories as compiled by Papacharissi (2002b), Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmohl, and Sapp (2006) pushed blogging research out of its English-language domain and into the realm of Polish bloggers; their findings suggested that while Polish bloggers do seek social interaction through their blogs, their primary motive and gratification is self-expression.

Other studies have used the U&G approach to examine the psychosocial characteristics of bloggers who reveal personal information about themselves on their blogs (an activity termed "self-disclosure") and predict the profiles and motivations of personal journal bloggers with high levels of "disclosiveness" (Hollenbaugh, 2010; Lee et al., 2008).

### **Self-Presentation in Blogs**

Research attempting to discover why bloggers blog has typically used *either* surveys/interviews to uncover bloggers' motivations and gratifications *or* content analysis. Papacharissi (2002b) used a combination of the two methods in her study of personal homepages, although her survey yielded a low response rate. Tellingly, Nardi et

al.'s (2004) conversational interviews with 23 bloggers concluded that "most bloggers are acutely aware of their readers, even in confessional blogs, calibrating what they should and should not reveal" (pp. 42-43). While awareness of motives is an expected element of the U&G approach as explained by Katz et al. (1974), bloggers' apparent awareness of having an audience (or potential audience) is significant because their blogs then become exercises in self-presentation to that audience. Self-presentation is by no means a new topic in the social sciences. Goffman's (1959) seminal work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, continues to be refreshingly current, readable, and applicable. Goffman conceptualized the presentation of self as an "ongoing process of information management," wherein the individual is constantly playing "a kind of information game – a potentially infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation, and rediscovery" (p. 8). According to this theory of communication, the individual tries to influence and manage the impressions that other people develop of him/her, and Goffman made the distinction between two kinds of communication: the "expressions given" and the "expressions given off" (p. 4). The expressions *given off* are the ones not explicitly stated, but rather the non-verbal, presumably unintentional, and contextual impressions that others may interpret. The information game, or, as Goffman also calls it, the "performance," is the combination and control of the two kinds of communication.

Blogs provide an ideal setting for this type of performance, because compared to face-to-face interpersonal communication, bloggers have much greater control over the amount and type of information disclosed, allowing them to create in their audiences their desired impression (Papacharissi, 2002a, 2007). Bloggers may customize the blog templates and designs provided by software companies, playing further with the

impressions given off by their blogs. Dominick (1999) examined the self-presentation strategies (“impression construction”) of individuals who created personal homepages by compiling and analyzing the kinds of information included on the webpage, e.g., descriptive biography, resume, employment information, information about family/friends/partner, and introspection. Dominick found that “behavior on the web seems to mirror self-presentation in the interpersonal setting” (p. 652). Several studies over the last decade have used the concept of self-presentation in their analysis of computer-mediated communication such as personal websites and blogs (e.g., Hollenbaugh, 2010; Papacharissi, 2002a, 2002b, 2007; Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005; Trammell et al., 2006). Self-presentation is of particular significance to the present study because it is through this theoretical lens that what an audience sees and reads in a blog—rather than what an individual blogger *thinks* he or she might be presenting—becomes the focus. Because of this distinction, content analysis is the research method of choice for this study, as it not only avoids the chance of collecting the socially desirable responses which can result from using the survey method, but also drives the research focus toward the characteristics of the blogs themselves as well as the bloggers’ perceived gratifications. Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005) made a similar choice to use content analysis (and not surveys) in their investigation of impression management tactics among popular celebrity bloggers.

### **Military Blogs**

Studies that used a specific type of blog in order to extend the general understanding of blogs as communication and information tools have been helpful in framing the present study. For example, Lagu, Kaufman, Asch, and Armstrong’s (2008)

study of medical professionals' blogs and blogging activities explored what was special about how blogs were used by professionals and how their writing reflects on the whole of their profession. In studying the Polish blogosphere, Trammell et al. (2006) provided a valuable example of an attempt to fill gaps within the blogging and U&G literature by describing an overlooked group of bloggers and their blogs, much like the present study will do by examining military blogs. While there is a multitude of scholarly research and popular reports focused on blogs, bloggers, and blogging activities, almost all studies concentrate on the civilian or general public; as stated earlier, published empirical research on military blogging is scant. The popular press has been covering milblogs and milbloggers for years (notably, Noah Shachtman's posts on Danger Room blog on Wired.com; and also: Burden, 2006; Bromwich, 2007; Cavanaugh, 2002; Stanford & Trudeau, 2007; milblogging.com). Curiously, outside of popular magazines and a few blogs-into-books examples, the coverage of the milblogging phenomenon has been limited to professional and trade publications, including peer-reviewed military journals (e.g., Robbins, 2007; Thaden, 2006) and law review journals (e.g., Cornyn, 2008; Lytle, 2007), with the field of journalism being the only exception in the published scholarly research (e.g., Wall, 2005, 2006). (Estes (2008), an unpublished master's thesis about milblogs, is also an interesting and worthwhile academic exception.) Major Elizabeth Robbins' (2007) unique, descriptive article in *Military Review* informs the present study; although it presented a non-empirical, non-academic examination of milblogs and the soldiers who blog, it is unique in the published literature for its description of the circumstances, issues, benefits, and motivations of soldier bloggers *from the soldier*

*perspective*. The soldier-bloggers' motivations for blogging mentioned in the article can be grouped into six general categories for purposes of brevity:

1. to communicate with friends and family;
2. to share experiences with outsiders/general audience;
3. to counter inaccuracies in the mainstream media about the wars and soldiers' experiences;
4. to satisfy a need for a creative, intellectual, or emotional outlet;
5. to share lessons learned with junior officers and new recruits; and
6. to build and maintain online community (Robbins, 2007).

While some of these motives overlap with the motivations for bloggers in the civilian public, the uniqueness of the milblogger's position should not be ignored. Other military sources (e.g., Thaden, 2006) and law review sources (e.g., Lytle, 2007) have discussed freedom-of-speech issues for the milblogger and security concerns about openness of information operations; despite being informative about the regulations and some descriptive elements of milblogs, they are less relevant to the study of milbloggers' gratifications from blogging activities. The present study seeks to extend the research of blogging and U&G by exploring milbloggers as a current and specialized yet overlooked group of bloggers. Following the example of research goals articulated in Herring et al. (2005), this study provides an "empirical snapshot" of the milblog at its present stage, therefore creating a historical record and reference point for purposes of comparison with future research on the milblogging phenomenon.



## Potential Issues in Blog Research

It is important to acknowledge the potential issues with researching blogs and bloggers, especially as online communication media increasingly become part of the social science researcher's toolkit. As stated earlier in this review, questions about the "trustworthiness" of bloggers' expressions and "worries about the art of impression management" in the online context are not concerns for the present study because the descriptions of the blogs as they actually are and the gratifications as they are perceived by an audience is what is of interest to this research (see Hookway, 2008 for summary of similar concerns as well as arguments highlighting the benefits of blog research). Most saliently, there are undeniable issues involved in properly and adequately sampling, analyzing, and coding blogs and blog information (Hookway, 2008; Li & Walejko, 2008). Simply put, "although it may be easy to locate blogs and bloggers on the Internet, creating a probability sample or a robust non-probability sample remains quite difficult" (Li & Walejko, 2008, p. 281). The research surveyed for Li and Walejko's review contained a wide variety of levels of explanation of methodologies, and the authors cautioned researchers to record and report both their blog research methods and any errors encountered (p. 290). The present study intends to heed this advice; see Methods section for details about collecting and sampling milblogs.

Over the last decade, research on blogs and bloggers has been a focus in communications and information science, and there is a place for milblog research within that literature. By examining blogging in different contexts, researchers can follow how this type of online communication changes over time. In the current literature, the U&G approach is used to explore why bloggers blog, and Goffman's concept of self-

presentation provides a theoretical basis for using content analysis to analyze blogs and blogging activities. By extending research into the area of military blogs, the soldiers' perspective on the current events in Iraq and Afghanistan can be illuminated and perhaps better understood, and a significant gap in the blogging and U&G scholarship can be filled.

## **Method**

### **Background of Methods**

For over 60 years, the content analysis technique has provided researchers with a method of organizing and analyzing messages in the fields of journalism, communications, sociology, psychology, business, and more recently, information science, healthcare services, and mass media studies (Neuendorf, 2002; Krippendorff, 2004). Content analysis has been defined in disparate ways; usually, the definition includes the researcher's bias toward *quantitative* or *qualitative* research methods. (See Neuendorf (2002) for an example of a quantitative bias and Hsieh and Shannon (2005) for an example of a qualitative bias in the definitions of "content analysis.") Quantitative researchers may define the technique as a systematic, objective, and replicable analysis of messages manifest in communication, whereas qualitative researchers tend to underscore the method's rigorous attention not only to the "shallow counting game" (Krippendorff, 2004, *Preface*) but also to the context of the messages which allow interpretations to be made. Originally developed to analyze newspapers, advertisements, books, and questionnaire responses, content analysis is now also used to examine the messages in multimedia formats, such as websites and video (Spurgen & Wildemuth, 2009).

While content analysis is traditionally regarded as a precisely *quantitative* analysis method, and several researchers misuse the specific term to refer to *any* analysis of text content (e.g., Lagu et al., 2008), there exist valuable alternative qualitative

approaches to the analysis of content which can promote new theory development as well as reinforce existing theories and research (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Seemingly outraged by the “widespread but wrongheaded assumption that ‘anyone can do it’ with no training,” several quantitative researchers have written exacting handbooks on the practicalities of the methodology and its standards (e.g., Neuendorf, 2002, p. xv). Despite this debate about how to classify the methods, there is substantial current literature that makes room for qualitative analyses of content (whether or not strictly named “content analysis”). This literature presents such *qualitative* methods as systematic, reliable, and valid (Krippendorff, 2004; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Trammell, et al., 2006). Of particular interest to the present study is the revised concept of content analysis that Krippendorff asserted in his 2004 work:

“the quantitative/qualitative distinction is a mistaken dichotomy between the two kinds of justifications of content analysis designs: the explicitness and objectivity of scientific data processing on the one side and the appropriateness of the procedures used relative to a chosen context on the other. For the analysis of texts, both are indispensable. [...] [Q]ualitative approaches to text interpretation should not be considered incompatible with content analysis.” (p. 87-89).

Setting aside this “mistaken dichotomy” and expanding the definition of content analysis can benefit both quantitative and qualitative research while still leaving room for systematized, rigorous examination. Geertz’s concept of “thick description” (characteristic of anthropological research) need not consume rigorously quantitative social science methods; the combination of the two approaches can actually act as external checks on one another (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Adhering to the rules of quantitative content analysis and its reliance on intersubjectivity (Neuendorf, 2004, p. 11) is just as important as recognizing the true nature of what social research data are: “what

we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to" (Geertz, 1973, p. 9). Indeed, as Krippendorff astutely asserted, both are indispensable.

Classification categories (or coding schemes) in traditional content analysis have three primary characteristics: (1) categories are determined before analysis begins, meaning that the analysis will be primarily deductive; (2) categories must be exhaustive so as to cover all possible options; and finally, (3) categories must be mutually exclusive, meaning that content cannot fall into more than one category (Neuendorf, 2002; Spurgin & Wildemuth, 2009). Qualitative content analysis, as described by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) may differ from traditional content analysis in both its structure and form.

According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), there are three distinct approaches to qualitative content analysis: conventional content analysis, directed content analysis, and summative content analysis. Each method has its own advantages and challenges, as briefly described below.

**Conventional content analysis.** In conventional content analysis, codes are derived directly from the text; emergent categories are created from the content and codes are grouped into meaningful clusters (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). An advantage of this approach is that the researcher may avoid imposing preconceived categories or theories onto the data. One of the challenges of the conventional approach is potentially low internal validity (or credibility). If the researcher fails to identify key categories, the findings will not accurately represent the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Another challenge is that while it is similar to the grounded theory method, and

the two can be easily confused, the approach does not proceed toward developing a theory but rather stops at concept development (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1281).

**Directed content analysis.** Content analysis using the directed approach begins with a theory or relevant research findings and uses those as a guide to the initial coding scheme. Operationalization (or a working definition) is created using the existing theory or prior research. A key advantage of this approach is that it can help support and extend theories. Unlike in more naturalistic approaches, within the directed content analysis, researchers are necessarily biased, and they may be more likely to find supportive evidence of a predetermined theory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Additionally, the emphasis on theory and previous research may blind researchers to the current study's context. These limitations may be somewhat ameliorated by what Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe as an audit trail, an exercise in keeping track of decisions and assumptions, thereby making biases explicit.

**Summative content analysis.** Summative content analysis is similar to the traditional quantitative analysis method because it starts with identifying and counting certain words or content, that is, the “manifest” content (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Spurgin & Wildemuth, 2009). However, the summative approach continues by doing more than just quantifying the content; a “latent” content analysis follows the counting, and interpretations are drawn about the underlying meanings of the messages. While this approach has the advantages of scientific methods (much as quantitative content analysis has), it is limited because unlike other qualitative methods, the larger context may be ignored (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The present study uses a combination of the directed and summative approaches and will use iterative pattern coding.

**Iterative Pattern Coding.** In his detailed article about the constant comparative method, Glaser (1965) explicates the step-by-step procedure for conducting a qualitative study using this method. The four continuous stages asserted in his seminal work—(1) comparing incidents applicable to each property, (2) integrating categories and their properties, (3) delimiting the theory, and (4) writing the theory—are essential to what can be considered the full-fledged version of this method (p. 439). As theory development is outside the scope of the present study, it is the data collecting and processing aspects of constant comparison methods that are of particular interest. Within the relevant literature, discussion of the constant comparison method usually involves other key methodological elements such as memoing, inductive analysis, saturation, negative case analysis, and code decay (Glaser, 1965; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Constant comparison method requires the researcher to keep track of ideas throughout the research process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 109). A type of constant comparison method called “iterative pattern coding” is utilized in the present study. Comparable to the constant comparison method, iterative pattern coding “involves repeated readings of the transcribed data leading to the development of a coding scheme for continued analysis” (Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2006, p. 1398). The action of coding forces the researcher to identify chunks of information, name concepts, and cluster similarly themed units (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 62). Using iterative pattern coding, the researcher can start with a list of codes and work inductively from there by constantly revising, adding, and discarding codes as they expand, emerge, and decay (this process is particularly well-explicated in Miles and Huberman (1994)). Saturation is achieved when no more new codes are being added or subtracted from the scheme; saturation is the point

at which the researcher can stop collecting new data and move onto analyzing and understanding the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 343). In the present study, iterative pattern coding is used for coding both the milblog content and the milbloggers' possible gratifications.

### **Sampling Blogs**

Sampling content from the Internet can be problematic because the populations of particular types of websites (e.g., blogs) are unknowable (Spurgin & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 300). Findings from nonrandom, or non-probability, samples cannot be generalized from the sample to the general population (Neuendorf, 2002, p.87). As noted in Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005) in their content analysis study of self-presentation in celebrity blogs, a complete directory of blogs does not exist, and so it was impossible to select a random sample; Li and Walejko (2008) also cautioned researchers that while it is easy to locate blogs online, it is "hard to create a robust non-probability sample," especially considering the number of abandoned blogs, spam blogs (also known as "splogs"), and the complicated definition of what a blog even is, as other social networking websites and user-generated content becomes increasingly popular (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) (p. 281-2). Several research studies have used blog aggregators in attempts to circumnavigate some of these issues (Lagu et al., 2008; Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005), but there are concerns regarding this method as well. Most importantly, the bias of aggregators is transferred to the sampling frame itself as blog aggregators do not index *all* blogs (Li & Walejko, 2008; Spurgin & Wildemuth, 2009) and changes in the aggregators make it impossible to replicate findings (e.g., often an aggregator stops updating its lists as was the case with Popdex, the blog aggregator used by Trammell and Keshelashvili in



their 2005 study of Polish blogs). Another significant danger with sampling blogs is the qualitative researcher's tendency to go to the "meatiest, most study-relevant sources" at the cost of missing the peripheral samples, despite the fact that peripheral examples may yield the double rewards of revealing new and different information as well as informing the "center" samples (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 34). Notably, guides to content sampling bluntly warn researchers that it is easy to become overwhelmed in the process of sampling and unitization (e.g., McMillan, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Neuendorf, 2002).

Despite these challenges to qualitative studies in general and qualitative blogging research in particular, initial selection decisions must still be made (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 30). For this study, the researcher attempted to triangulate her efforts in finding blogs; more than one source was used. A military blog aggregator was the primary source for finding current milblogs. Milblogging.com, currently the largest military blog aggregator, helped the researcher find relevant blogs. The website was started by Jean-Paul Borda in 2005 after he returned from serving in Operation Enduring Freedom (the War in Afghanistan), where he maintained a blog about his experiences. The site has since been bought by military.com, which is a subsidiary of Monster Worldwide, most famous for the monster.com website. As mentioned above, there are necessarily biases inherent in all aggregator sites, and the milblogging.com site is no exception. To counteract these biases, the researcher also searched the Blogger blog host (blogspot.com, the blogging software available through Google) for the words "soldier," "military blog," and "milblog" to identify additional blogs for the sample and check the sample collected from milblogging.com. This "theoretical sampling method" is comparable to the method

utilized in several blog research studies (e.g., Lagu et al., 2008; Wall, 2006). Only Blogger sites were collected from the milblogging.com aggregator, based on the model of using a specific blog host to aid in limiting samples used in other studies (e.g., Chung & Kim, 2007; Papacharissi, 2002a).

### **Research Design and Procedures**

Preparation for data collection and analysis for the present study began in mid-December 2010. The study commenced in February 2011 and concluded with results reported by early April 2011. Because of time and financial constraints, the study was conducted by the author alone, without the luxury of formalized inter-coder testing. As mentioned above, the blog sample was selected from several different sources, including an aggregator site (milblogging.com), searching within a blogging host (Blogger), and using Google to search for soldier blogs. In order to restrict the sample (to avoid it becoming unwieldy), there were several defining constraints on the milblogs for the sample. The sample of milblogs collected contained only blogs that were:

1. created and maintained by active-duty members of the U.S. Military currently deployed in Iraq or Afghanistan (i.e., not government contractors, military officials, veterans, or military family members);
2. freely accessible;
3. publicly available;
4. not password-protected;
5. not login-required;
6. currently updated and have posts from within the predetermined date range;

7. on the Blogger host site (blogspot.com); and
8. findable through milblogging.com or through searching Blogger.

Since this study is too small to analyze the entire contents of the milblogs, a predetermined date range of three months—specifically, from June 2009 – August 2009—was used to limit the content of the blogs. The time span of three months was determined based on previous blog studies (e.g., Chung & Kim, 2007; Wall, 2006); the exact time period was determined based on current blog availability as well as the number of consistent posts. Only blogs that contained more than three posts per month were considered for the study, so that all the blogs could be reasonably considered to be active. The same three-month range was used for all the blogs collected. Training data collected and analyzed in January 2011 helped the researcher determine the appropriate date-range for the official sample.

Once the milblogs were sampled and obtained, the blog posts from June 2009 – August 2009 were “taken down” from the Internet, meaning that the researcher copied and pasted the text of the blog posts into Microsoft Word documents. This was done so that the content would be frozen and could not be changed or removed by the individual blogger or by Google’s Blogger during the period of study. It was also easier to de-identify the blogs once they were in a controlled, text-only form. Blogs/bloggers were identified only by a Blog ID (e.g., Milblogger AA, Milblogger BB, Milblogger CC, etc.) and each blog post was identified only by alphanumeric code (e.g., AA01, BB06, CC12, etc.). Blog posts—rather than complete blogs or aesthetic blog characteristics—were the unit of analysis for this study.

Since the goals of study were to examine both the content and the gratifications of the milblogs, the coding procedure was a two-step process. First the blog post's content was coded, using an iterative pattern coding system without predetermined categories, using a more conventional content analysis method. The researcher tried to determine the overall theme of the blog post; while posts could have more than one overall theme, the researcher attempted to categorize the post as having only one or two main themes. Blog posts were not considered to have more than two main themes. Emerging themes were determined by analyzing the words used in the blog post and the overall theme of the post.

After the posts had been coded for content, they were then coded by possible gratification. Using the coding schemes asserted in previous blogging studies (see Appendix A for various coding schemes of gratifications), the coder used a combination of directed and summative content analysis to determine how to categorize the possible gratifications the milbloggers might get from blogging their experiences. At first, the researcher attempted to use only the six categorizes from Robbins (2007), but though categories seemed insufficient and poorly matched for the variety of milblog content. After broadening the coding scheme to include codes from other studies, coding began to make more sense. Unlike quantitative content analysis, codes for gratifications were not mutually exclusive, and many posts were coded with more than one gratification.

### **Rationale**

As discussed in the literature review section of this paper, content analysis seems well-suited for the present study because it drives at the research goals of the study – to explore the content of milblogs and the motivations of milbloggers using the uses and

gratifications approach with attention to bloggers' presentation of self. As explained earlier, Goffman's concept of self-presentation is of particular significance to the present study because it highlights the importance of what an audience *actually* sees and reads in a blog, rather than what an individual blogger *thinks* he or she might be presenting. Content analysis not only avoids the chance of collecting the socially desirable responses (which can be the result of using the survey method), but also directs the research focus toward the characteristics and content of the blogs themselves as clues to the milbloggers' perceived gratifications. While several U&G studies have conducted surveys and some other mixed methods approaches, the present study will follow in the footsteps of Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005), who made a similar choice to use content analysis (and not surveys) in their investigation of impression management tactics among popular celebrity bloggers.

Based on the present study's research questions, iterative pattern coding is an ideal qualitative method because it allows the flexibility of combining deductive and inductive methods as well as raises the level of credibility because it encourages the researcher to constantly revise and reassess the codes as they emerge and decay. In using iterative pattern coding, the researcher must be prepared to change the coding scheme as she goes, all the while recording her decisions and thought processes.

### **Ethical Issues**

All social research must consider the ethical issues involved in analyzing and reporting data, and the present study is no exception. Since this study examines only information freely and publicly available, and milblogs are *not* artifacts of research but rather occur in the natural world separate from analysis, this study was much less

obtrusive than surveying or interviewing human subjects would be. That said, blog research is a nuanced case of social research because bloggers may have posted private, personal, or potentially incriminating information in a publicly accessible forum. Search technology has made access to that posted content very easy. Additionally, because of the current Operations Security (OPSEC) regulations (Department of the Army Headquarters, 2007) and the military/civilian cultural divide, research of milblogs may be considered *even more sensitive* – especially in the midst of two ongoing wars. The researcher is aware that once this study is available to readers (either as an unpublished paper or a published manuscript), she is no longer in control of how the research findings may be used or construed. The researcher has not consulted with milbloggers and will be examining only blogs that are freely and publicly accessible, with no password or login required. For all the reasons listed above, neither the milbloggers' identities nor their published words will be revealed in the study. Coding of the blog characteristics is generally limited to yes/no responses to whether a particular feature is present; specific details of the blog or blogger's identity will not be reported. Blog content is reported only in paraphrase or in a generalized manner. *Direct quotations* from the milblogs are not reported or excerpted because entering the quoted text into a search engine such as Google could easily compromise anonymity. There is a coded identifier (e.g., AA, BB, CC, etc.) for each blog/blogger, and it is not linked back to the milblog. Every action possible has been taken to keep the researcher's memos accurate and updated, so that a detailed audit trail was created throughout the research process. The researcher has considered these sensitive issues and has practiced caution to protect the anonymity of

the milbloggers and their blogs. Moreover, the researcher considers their protection and anonymity paramount to her study.

### **Qualitative Research and Trustworthiness**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 329), naturalistic inquiry methods—such as the iterative pattern coding method to be used in this study—cannot *compel* an audience to accept their trustworthiness, but can only, at best, *persuade* readers. Whereas quantitative research strives for validity and reliability, qualitative research is usually judged on a basis of its “trustworthiness,” which comprises credibility, transferability, reliability/dependability, and confirmability (Bradley, 1993; Choemprayong & Wildemuth, 2009; Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba clearly paralleled qualitative terminology with that of conventional quantitative research; that is, they asserted that “credibility” is similar to internal validity; “transferability” is similar to external validity; “dependability” is similar to reliability; and “confirmability” is similar to objectivity (p. 219). Using Lincoln and Guba as the basis of her definitions, Bradley defines credibility as “the adequate representation of the constructions of the social world under study” (1993, p. 436). The present study strived for credibility, or internal validity, by following some of Lincoln and Guba’s suggestions, namely, persistent observation over a reasonable amount of time (January through March, 2011), searching for negative cases, and triangulation (using multiple sources—in this case, using both milblogging.com and searching blogspot.com for other blogs). Another element of trustworthiness, transferability, is not a priority for the present study since particularity, rather than generalizability, is usually central to qualitative research (see Creswell, 2009, p. 193). Dependability (or consistency) is similar to Choemprayong and Wildemuth’s

definition of reliability. For the present study, consistency has been achieved through an explication of the researcher's role (see Discussion section below) and a careful memoing process, wherein the researcher took notes on her decisions, definitions, and coding scheme development separate from the collected data. As discussed earlier, creating an audit trail is an important aspect of building trustworthiness for a qualitative study. Also, as in many information science studies, external reliability is *not* expected (Choemprayong & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 284); since the intent of the study is to act as a benchmark of milblogs at a particular time, serving as a historical point of comparison, it will likely *not* be consistent with future examinations of the phenomenon. Unfortunately, given the constraints of this study, low confirmability (objectivity) is a disadvantage for the present study: milblogging experts have not performed a check on the findings, and the researcher coded the characteristics and content by herself. Having an outside expert to confirm results and having multiple coders to compare their findings would certainly create higher confirmability. Overall, the methods chosen to explore milblogging in the present study—qualitative content analysis through iterative pattern coding—have yielded reasonably trustworthy results.



## **Results**

Twelve blogs were selected according to the aforementioned procedures and parameters. Within the June 2009 – August 2009 date range, the 12 blogs comprised 138 blog posts. All blogs were authored by male, active-duty military members, between the ages of 22 and 41. (The research study did not require an all-male sample; there were simply fewer female-authored milblogs available.) Eight of the 12 blogs were written by U.S. military members deployed to Iraq; four were milblogs from Afghanistan. Seven milbloggers served with the Army, two with the Marines, two with the Air Force, and one with the Navy. All milblogs selected had to have a minimum of three blog posts per month (so total minimum was nine posts for January 2009 – March 2009 range). The number of blog posts per milblog selected ranged from 9 to 16 posts. Blog posts varied in length and some included photographs or links to other online content. See Table 1 for overview of blog sample.

*Table 1: Overview of Milblog Sample: Country, Branch of Armed Forces, and Number of Posts*

Blog ID	Country	Branch	Number of Posts (06-2009 – 08-2009)
AA	Iraq	Army	9
BB	Iraq	Army	14
CC	Iraq	Army	12
DD	Iraq	Army	9
EE	Iraq	Marines	9
FF	Iraq	Marines	16
GG	Iraq	Navy	11
HH	Iraq	Air Force	14
JJ	Afghanistan	Army	13
KK	Afghanistan	Army	9
LL	Afghanistan	Army	11
MM	Afghanistan	Air Force	11

*Note.* Total number of milblogs sampled=12. Total number of blog posts sampled=138.

### **Milblog Content**

Many distinct themes emerged from the analysis of the blog content. The researcher did not approach the analysis with themes in mind, but rather allowed them to emerge from the blog posts through analysis. Themes were collected iteratively. Fourteen main themes emerged, as well as a handful of smaller themes that were not found in enough blog posts to warrant their own categories. Blog content categories were not mutually exclusive; however, the researcher attempted to capture the overall theme of the content of the post and code the post as having only one or two themes. This forced the

researcher to clearly decide how to categorize the blog's content. The themes that emerged were: home (family and friends), local employees (including translators), local citizenry (including children and villagers), local culture, home (general), media coverage of the wars, local politics in Iraq or Afghanistan, God/spirituality, weather, America or feelings of patriotism toward America, deaths or injuries attributable to the wars, sand, military or insurgent attacks, and the events of September 11. Less-dominant themes in the blog posts included focus on weapons or gadgets; interactions with other Coalition troops (e.g., "hanging out" with British soldiers); U.S. politics; entertainment activities such as reading, watching movies, or playing video games; and discussion of women or sex. These less-dominant themes were categorized in a combined theme entitled "Other." See Appendix B: Codebook for Blog Content for definitions of each theme.

*Table 2: Milblog Content Themes and Percentage of Occurrence*

Content themes	Blog posts coded with theme (%)
Home (Family and Friends)	18%
Local Employees (Translators)	18%
Local Citizenry	11%
Local Culture	10%
Home (General)	8%
Other	8%
Media Coverage	7%
Local Politics	6%
God	5%
Weather	5%
America/Patriotism	5%
Casualties	4%
Sand	4%
Attacks	2%
September 11	1%

*Note.* Percentages do not add up to 100% because a few posts were categorized as having more than one main content theme. Content theme coding was not exclusive, though attempts toward exclusivity were made; blog posts could be coded with up to two themes. “Other” content included content focused on weapons/gadgets, interactions with Coalition troops, U.S. politics, entertainment activities, or sex/discussion of women.

As listed in Table 2, the most-prevalent themes to emerge were focus on friends and family at home (18%) and focus on local employees (18%). Content that focused on friends and family at home sometimes directly addressed family that the milblogger knew would be reading, and sometimes just discussed family and friends at home. Direct

communication with family through the blog posts was common, with milbloggers checking in with a spouse and children or thanking them for their packages or emails. “Local employees/translators” comprised mostly Iraqis or Afghanis working as translators for the military or contractors. Many posts focused entirely on translators as individuals or as a group as well as on the relationship between the military and the individual translators. Milblogger CC wrote extensively about the two Iraqi men he worked with, including a deep discussion on how he felt about what they were doing and whether he wanted to help them become American citizens. Milblogger LL also wrote a great deal about his translator, as well as his Afghani “tour guide” who taught LL about Afghani food customs and etiquette.

Relatedly, “Local citizenry” and “Local culture” were the next most dominant themes. There were many blog posts written about the local children and interactions with them, both formal (building schools) and informal (seeing them in the streets, handing out Beanie Babies to them). Bloggers also wrote about local villagers and shepherds. There were several posts explicitly about Dari language learning, local food (especially goat and lamb), and local dating customs and etiquette between the sexes. The researcher sometimes coded the blog posts with more than one theme code because they contained overlapping content focus. For example, in his posts about his translator, Milblogger FF also writes about what his translator tells him about his arranged marriage. This reminds FF of when he was courting his wife back as a college student in the United States. This post’s content is explicitly about local employees, local culture, and loved ones back home.

### Milblog Gratifications

By analyzing 138 blog posts using a combination of the coding schemes used in previous research studies about blogging motivations, six main categories of gratifications emerged: documenting one's life; communicating with friends and family; satisfying a creative, intellectual, or emotional need; offering commentary or opinions to counter news reports in the mainstream media; information-sharing with junior officers or new recruits; and building and maintaining an online blogger community. (See Table 3 for the percentage of occurrence for each gratification.)

*Table 3: Emergent Milblogging Gratifications and Percentage of Occurrence*

Possible Gratification	Number of Posts	Blog Posts Coded (%)
Documenting one's life	113	82%
Communicating with friends and family	98	71%
Satisfying a creative, intellectual, or emotional need	80	58%
Offering commentary or opinions to counter mainstream media	36	26%
Information sharing with junior officers/recruits	26	19%
Building online community	6	4%

*Note.* Neither the number of posts nor the percentages add up to 100% because coding was not exclusive. Many blog posts were coded as having more than one possible gratification.

The dominant gratification seemed to be documenting one's daily life, that is, writing about day-to-day activities, including mundane and exciting details of daily happenings. In its "purest" form, this type of blog post would not contain feelings or

commentary about the events, but rather would contain simply a play-by-play of what happened. For example, most of Milblogger AA's posts included details about what time AA got up in the morning, that he said his prayers, how the weather has been, what he did that day, and highlights of what was said to him. Details about specific locations or specific directives were, of course, always absent so as not to break OPSEC regulations. 82% of blog posts examined were coded as having the gratification of documenting the soldier's day.

## **Discussion**

It would be foolish to draw conclusions about the entire genre of milblogs from such a circumscribed study of a handful of milblogs. That said, this study did illuminate some of the deeper questions about military blogs as well as about research studies utilizing the U&G approach for new media use. As stated in the Introduction, academic research into milblogging is scant. The few mentions of milblogging that do exist in the literature portray milblogging as a monolithic sub-set of blogs, a faddish footnote in a larger blog study. This study reveals a more nuanced portrait of milblogs, highlighting both how ordinary and extraordinary these blogs are. One on hand, milblogs seem to help soldiers document their day-to-day activities, just as a traditional journal might, or, more tellingly, as any ordinary (non-military) blog might. On the other hand, milbloggers are paying more attention to the local people and culture in which they are situated than the media ever let news-watching Americans know. The researcher found many blog posts exclusively focused on Iraqi people and customs, on Afghani food and political struggles, and on the complicated interpersonal relationships between soldiers and citizens of an occupied territory. While milbloggers seem to be using their blogs to stay in touch with friends and family back home in the United States (in lieu of mass emailing or countless personal emails), they are also using their blogs to do more than just stay in touch with loved ones. The researcher did not expect the blogs to detail so much of the local culture in Iraq and Afghanistan. Perhaps milbloggers are doing that for the benefit of their



friends and family, but their sharing of their experiences interacting with a foreign people and culture makes the blogs a fascinating, educational read for a general audience as well. So it should be considered that milbloggers may be receiving a particular gratification from their role as storytellers in this way.

This study also counters the assumption that soldiers are using their blogs primarily to voice political opinions or offer alternative news. About one quarter of the blog posts that were coded for this study appeared to show that that was the reason for the milbloggers' blogging. However, this finding must be carefully explored because of the strict Operations Security regulations binding any military blog. From her private reading experiences, the researcher knows that blogs from earlier in the GWOT may offer a very different picture of what milbloggers blogged about. It could be that bloggers are more careful about what they share in public blogs now that their blogs are more likely to be checked by their commanders. Also, after OPSEC regulations called attention specifically to blogs, several milbloggers shut down their blogs in protest; now that blogs are more heavily monitored, there are deployed servicemen and women who may choose not to blog their political opinions at all.

While the findings of this study suggest six main possible gratifications that milbloggers receive from their blogging behaviors, in truth, gratifications research was messy and challenging, and these gratifications may or may not be perceived by the milbloggers themselves. Throughout the relevant literature there does not appear to be adequate acknowledgement of the limitations of using the U&G approach, or, more broadly, of how difficult it is to glean reasonable results from blog research. Both Hookway (2008) and Li and Walejko (2008) caution researchers about the pitfalls and

limitations of blog research; these challenges cannot be underestimated. Originally, this study attempted to use Robbins' (2007) motivations as a coding scheme for analyzing gratifications. This seemed logical because her article is one of the only peer-reviewed papers published specifically about milbloggers. It became increasingly clear that it was hard—if not impossible—to determine whether a milblogger was blogging to communicate with loved ones at home in the U.S., or to communicate with a general audience of readers, or to recount his experiences for himself as a form of emotional or creative catharsis. Those three motivations were often entangled and distinctions between them unknowable. When someone documents the play-by-play happenings of their day, is he writing for himself or for someone else? What gratification does a soldier get from milblogging his experiences in Iraq or Afghanistan? Obviously, this was the driving question of this research study, but in practice, the categorization decisions that the researcher had to make often felt too subjective. Using the best methods she could find, the researcher analyzed and came up with the six aforementioned categories, combining Robbins' (2007) categories with the gratification schemes asserted by other studies. While these codes seemed to hold up after multiple checks, it must still be acknowledged that U&G studies are difficult and leave room for research subjectivity, especially without a system of intercoder checking. All unobtrusive gratifications studies involve attempts at inhabiting the mind the user (in this case, the milblogger), and there are limits to how possible that can be as well as how reliable the results may be. This is as true of other U&G research studies as it is of the present one.

## **Role of the Researcher**

Further research into milblogging will need to be conducted in order to test, validate, and expand any findings reported as a result of this study. The researcher's role as an outsider in military circles should be noted, both for its advantages and limitations.

As an outsider, the author was not initially familiar with military jargon, OPSEC regulations, rank or armed services branch cultures, or milblogging culture. Her outsider status creates different assumptions and biases from those of a military-embedded or military-connected researcher. The researcher's outsider perspective may be viewed as naïveté or ignorance or—ideally—open-mindedness, depending on the reader's opinion. As qualitative content analysis often invites a higher level of criticism regarding research bias and low trustworthiness (compared to quantitative methods), the role of the author as an outsider and an unseasoned researcher needs to be acknowledged.

The present study has the additional challenge of focusing on the sensitive subject of a war that the American public seems to prefer to ignore. The researcher has strong personal opinions about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Using the best practices for physical and intellectual audit trail processes underscored by Carcary (2009) to make biases explicit, the researcher has made every attempt to document her assumptions, research steps, data categorization, and analysis decisions in the form of memoing in a composition notebook. While creating and maintaining an audit trail is recommended in theory (e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994), the researcher is aware that it is not always implemented in practice and was particularly interested in documenting her research to establish trustworthiness.

## **Future Research**

Future scholarly examinations of milblogs need to be done. Some ideas for future studies include looking at milblog characteristics (textual, photographic, and graphic design), using a larger sample of blogs and analyzing them over a longer time period, and doing a similar study to the present study, but with a system of intercoder checks (more researchers checking each other's coding for reliability). While this study skillfully frames the gap in the literature, there is certainly room for several more studies to use that gap as a guide and further shed light on the phenomenon of milblogging. Research examining milblogger characteristics would also help illuminate who is blogging from the frontlines of America's wars and how they might be special or ordinary compared to their military or non-military counterparts.

## **Conclusion**

Within the large and crowded arena of scholarly research on the general phenomenon of blogging, current research tends to explore specific types of blogs (e.g., non-English-language blogs, celebrity blogs, cancer patients' blogs) and how they might be similar or different to the pool of "general" blogs. The popular media have covered military blogging in news reports, editorials, and suggested reading lists, and the U.S. military has changed its policies based on its understanding of the activities within the blogosphere. And yet academics have been curiously slow to publish studies about this particular type of blog. In this era when the United States is fighting two long wars—and access to on-the-ground soldiers' voices is in many ways easier than ever, given the advanced technology available today—examining the personal blogs of people in combat seems not only appropriate but also crucial to the historical record. The present study examined milblogs using the uses and gratifications approach with the intent of exposing the why military bloggers blog as well as extending the communications framework of U&G to approach a new and specialized type of blog.

Qualitative content analysis methods were utilized to explore the milbloggers' self-presentation in their blogs; content analysis was the method of choice because it directed the research focus toward what the bloggers actually present in their blogs rather than what they feel/think they present. Iterative pattern coding, which is comparable to the constant comparison method, allowed the researcher to combine deductive and

inductive analysis approaches. Additionally, using iterative pattern coding as the method acted as an informal check on the analysis, because it forced the researcher to constantly and self-consciously consider categorization decisions. The coding process involved several revisions and refocusing on what was actually present in the blogs (as opposed to what the researcher assumed would be present).

Because of the unique challenges of using blogs in social research, the researcher kept comprehensive notes, detailing her intellectual audit trail, thereby increasing the credibility of this investigation into milblogging. This was especially important because of questions about proper sampling and ethical concerns about how to share direct quotations without exposing the identities of the bloggers. In some ways it was disappointing not to be able to use the milbloggers' words themselves as evidence of their possible gratifications. As stated earlier, it was not possible to use milbloggers' quotations while maintaining their anonymity, because their words could be easily traced back to their blogs using a search engine such as Google.

The six main categories of gratifications (motivations for milblogging) suggested by the findings of this study were: documenting life; communicating with friends and family; satisfying a creative, intellectual, or emotional need; offering commentary or opinion to counter the mainstream media coverage; sharing information with junior officers or new recruits; and building an online community of milbloggers. This list of gratifications attempts to cover all the significant reasons why milbloggers blog from Iraq or Afghanistan. The present study found it necessary to combine previous research of blogging gratifications because none of the current schemes seemed to encompass the unique world of milblogging. Milbloggers appear to have many similar gratifications as

non-military citizens, but their position as deployed soldiers may mean that they have slightly different reasons for blogging their experiences. Robbins (2007) asserted that soldier bloggers are different from non-soldier bloggers, and the present study's findings seem to support her assertions.

      Blogging technology in its current form will likely not survive the decades, but, sadly, war has punctuated American history and will continue to be a reality in our country's future (Anderson & Cayton, 2005). With more unrest and warfare currently erupting in the Middle East and North Africa, Americans have a vested interest in knowing what is happening on the ground. Examining milblogs is an opportunity to explore a slice of the historical record and gain a unique perspective from the soldiers actually fighting the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today, not every American knows a man or woman in uniform, but through soldiers' public accounts of their experiences, Americans might be able to learn a little more about what service members are blogging about while they are deployed in the name of the United States. Since there are policies regulating what milbloggers can share online, their blogs may not be complete proxies for their true experiences. But for scholarship to ignore the soldiers' words and photographs would be a mistake.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Blogging Gratifications Coding Schemes

Author (Date)	Gratifications
Papacharissi (2002b)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Passing time</li> <li>2. Entertainment</li> <li>3. Information</li> <li>4. Self-expression</li> <li>5. Professional advancement</li> <li>6. Communication with friends and family</li> </ol>
Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, and Schwartz (2004)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Documenting one's life</li> <li>2. Offering commentary and opinions</li> <li>3. Expressing emotions</li> <li>4. Thinking through writing</li> <li>5. Connecting with others online</li> </ol>
Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmohl, and Sapp (2006)	Used categories from Papacharissi (2002b)
Robbins (2007)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Communicate with friends and family</li> <li>2. Share experiences with outsiders/general audience</li> <li>3. Counter inaccuracies in the mainstream media about the wars</li> <li>4. Satisfy a need for a creative intellectual, or emotional outlet</li> <li>5. Share lessons learned with junior officers and new recruits</li> <li>6. Build and maintain an online community</li> </ol>



Chung and Kim (2008)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Prevention and Care</li><li>2. Problem-solving</li><li>3. Emotion management</li><li>4. Information sharing</li></ol>
Present Study (2011)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Documenting one's life</li><li>2. Communicating with friends and family</li><li>3. Satisfying a creative, intellectual, or emotional need</li><li>4. Offering commentary or opinion to counter the mainstream media coverage</li><li>5. Information-sharing for junior officers/new recruits</li><li>6. Building an online community</li></ol>

## Appendix B: Codebook for Blog Content

**Coder:** The author was the only coder for this study.

**Unit of Analysis:** The unit of analysis for this study will be the blog posts within the date range of June 2009 – August 2009.

**Procedure:** After blog posts are de-identified, blogs will be read, with content themes highlighted with a variety of colors. Blog posts must be read twice in first run, the coder will take notes on a separate sheet, and then coder will not look at posts or memos for at least 24 hours. In second run, coder will highlight themes. As patterns in themes emerge, coder will reassess themes for growth or decay.

**Definitions of codes** (alphabetically listed):

Code name	Definition
America/Patriotism	Focus on American history, American nationality, love of America, and the like
Attacks	Focus on attacks either perpetrated by the U.S./Coalition militaries or perpetrated by local forces
Casualties	Focus on deaths or injuries of American troops, Coalition troops, or local citizens
God/Spirituality	Focus on God, prayer, spiritualism, faith, and the like
Home (Friends and Family)	Focus on home in the United States, with particular attention to loved ones, including direct mention or addressing of spouse, children, siblings, parents, or friends

Home (General)	Focus on home in the United States, most often including missing home, the differences between home and the current place, what the milblogger plans to do when he returns home, and what he remembers about home in a general way
Local citizenry	Focus on Iraqi or Afghani citizens who are not employed by the U.S. military (e.g., children, villagers, shepherds, individual leaders)
Local culture	Focus on Iraqi or Afghani culture, including food, language, and customs
Local employees/translators	Focus on Iraqi or Afghani translators or others employed by the U.S. military
Local politics	Focus on what's going on politically within Iraq or Afghanistan, including discussion of local elections, local military/militia, and the like
Media coverage of the GWOT	Focus on how the mainstream media (MSM) are covering the wars, and may include links to MSM articles/interviews/videos
Sand	Focus on sand or sandstorms, usually accompanied by annoyance, irritation, or curiosity
September 11	Focus on discussion or remembering the events of September 11, 2001
Weather	(related but distinct from "Sand") Focus on the local weather/climate
Other	Focus on other themes, including weapons and gadgets, interactions with Coalition troops, U.S. politics, entertainment activities, or sex/interest in women

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